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**Proceedings and mechanisms of the European Commission
regarding the enlargement process of East-Central European
countries**

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RESEARCH SUMMARY

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Ever since the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 and its evolution into the European Economic Community in 1957, the enlargement topic represented a top priority, ever high on the agenda of the six founding countries, namely Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and The Netherlands. In the beginning, the accession process was "opened to all countries willing to take part [...] without discrimination or exception, with the aim of contributing to raising the living standards and to promoting peaceful achievements [...] will lay a true foundation for their economic unification" (Schuman, 1950). The events triggered by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the evolution of the East-Central European countries forced the Community to change its approach regarding the whole enlargement process.

The Fifth Enlargement of the European Union is likely to be regarded as one of the most complex, challenging, and significant European integration events. Giving its innovative nature, the number of candidate countries, and their unique political situation, "the accession of new member states will increase its diversity and heterogeneity. But widening must not be at the expense of deepening. Enlargement must not be a dilution of the Community's achievements. On this point there should be absolute clarity, on the part of the Member States and the applicants" (European Commission, 1992, p. 10). Once the iron curtain was lifted from East-Central European countries, it became clear for everyone that the world was changing. The European Community needed to keep up with this wind of change and adapt to the challenges ahead. The selected group of countries that represented the Member States needed to see the bigger picture, and since that moment, change became imminent.

The debate between widening and deepening led the integration process rhetoric. At the center of this debate was the European Commission. The Commission represented (and still represents) a vital institution for the future of Europe. Therefore, it needed to become a constructive partner for both its Member States and the candidate states and an honest broker between the European Union institutions and the European countries. In order to be able to do so, its elitist nature needed to change, and the prerogatives of a selected sphere of insiders could no longer be applied. The Commission approached the enlargement process differently through the period the enlargement process lasted, from 1989 till 2004, the equivalent of three Presidential mandates – Jacques Delors, Jacques Santer, and Romano Prodi. Each Commission brought innovation and change in the European Union, reflecting the Presidents personalities and their areas of interest and expertise. Every Commission analyzed had a specific element that defined it. The Delors Commission was defined by economic reform characterized



by the Single European Act and the creation of EMU, the Santer Commission was characterized by enlargement through Agenda 2000, and the Prodi Commission was characterized by reform.

On the other hand, all of these three Commissions had one element in common – all of them brought change. It all started from within, at the EU level, and soon this change extended towards the whole European continent and eventually towards the world. The incentive for change was the enlargement process.

During the Delors Commission, the first step in this endeavor was in 1990 when a series of association agreements, known as Europe Agreements, were negotiated. "The Commission believes that new means should be created for this purpose, building upon the existing 'architecture' of European organizations, so as to create a 'European political area.' [...] Various formulas have already been suggested, such as regular meetings between European countries at the level of Heads of State or Government, either in the framework of a confederation based on the Council of Europe or through a conference of European States meeting at the invitation of the European Council. Another formula, similar to the 'associate status' recently created within the Western European Union, would be to associate other European countries as 'partner-members' in specific Community policies, with the possibility to participate (but not to vote) in specific Community meetings on subjects of trans European interest" (European Commission, 1992, p. 18). However, Yugoslavia's events made it clear that the Europe Agreements were no longer enough, and the former communist countries needed a clearer perspective that should establish when and how to tackle their accession process. Therefore, in 1993 at the Copenhagen European Council, the Community Member States decided that "the associated countries in Central and Eastern Europe that so desire shall become members of the European Union. Accession will occur as soon as an associated country can assume membership obligations by satisfying the required economic and political conditions (European Council, 1993, p. 12).

The Santer Commission had a more pragmatic approach regarding the enlargement process. As he underlined, "we were more pragmatic and prudent than the Commission that succeeded us. At the beginning, we wanted to start negotiating on the basis of the criteria with three countries [...] once these countries were integrated, continue with five countries, and so on" (Santer, 2006). Santer's most outstanding achievement during his time in office was most certainly the Agenda 2000. In the Agenda 2000, the enlargement process played the central role, more significant than in any other official document of the Union to date. According to the European Commission, as exposed in the Second Volume of the Agenda 2000 (1997), the new strategy's objective was "solving the main problems



identified by the Commission in each opinion on the accession applications." In this regard, the Commission's methods changed, bringing new features to the reinforced pre-accession strategy, such as the Accession Partnerships and Participation in Community programs and mechanisms for applying the *acquis*. Due to corruption allegations, the whole Santer Commission was forced to resign, and the Prodi Commission was established in 1999.

As the enlargement process was still in full progress, the Prodi Commission embarked on a challenging reform process to prepare the Union for the new European landscape after 2000. President Santer initiated the reform process in 1995 to improve the Commission's budgetary and administrative culture. After the events in March 1999, when the Santer Commission resigned, there was an unprecedented level of expectations from the European public and the Member States that meaningful progress and change will be made. Hence, in 2000 immediately after taking office, the Prodi Commission embarked on a fundamental reform of its administration, procedures, and working methods to become an international public service of the highest standards and quality.

During Prodi's time in office, the Kosovo conflict started. While the EU did not participate directly in the OAF, it was the Kosovo crisis that provided the catalyst for transforming the EU into a powerful player in the international arena and the incentive the Union needed to move forward in the enlargement process by starting negotiations with the four candidate countries that were not prepared at Luxembourg. Thus, the Helsinki European Council paved the way for the Big Bang of 2004, when ten Eastern European former communist countries joined the European Union, and for the subsequent accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007.

The research focuses on the period between 1989 and 2007, as Romania and Bulgaria, two of the East-Central enlargement wave candidate countries, did not make the first cut and joined the Union three years later than expected and then the other fellow communist candidate countries. Due to the failure of pre-accession conditionality, Romania only joined the EU in 2007 together with Bulgaria. The Commission was forced to establish a never before seen post-accession conditionality mechanism for these countries - the Control and Verification Mechanism. This mechanism represents a monitoring tool that sets out benchmarks to verify Romania's judicial reform progress and fight against corruption. It was mainly established to assure both Romania and the rest of the Member States that all measures were taken to align Romania's administrative and judicial system with the rest of the European Union (European Commission, 2007a, p. 1).



Considering a large number of candidate countries and the number of the already Member States, as well as the problems both the East and the West were facing at the time, it was clear that Commission would play a central role in the whole process. Beyond its role of architect of the Treaties in which the task of providing an opinion on the accession of a country (art. 49 of the Treaty on the European Union), that was assigned to the Commission, it also provided support for the preparation of accession countries with funding, expertise, advice, managed the bilateral relations under the Europe Agreements, facilitated the twinning programs with the Member States, monitored compliance with the *acquis*, etc. All of these tasks took place in parallel with the deepening of the integration of the already Member States. These tasks required technical expertise and knowledge of the *acquis* as well as a high degree of objectivity that the Member States lacked. In this environment, the Commission was always an honest broker that made the (re)unification of the continent a historical reality.

Chapter 1. THE FALL OF COMMUNISM

The first chapter focuses on the transition period of the former communist states. This chapter serves as an introduction for the subject matter, focusing on the influence, the rise and the fall of the communist regime in Eastern European countries.

I have identified three main phases through which East-European countries went through during the communist regime. The first years of the regime were known as „Stalinism” and were defined by the control imposed by the Soviet regime either through the Red Army and the KGB, or by local communist elites also controlled by the Soviets. During this period the economy of the communist countries was surviving largely on the surplus of the countryside and the resources gathered before communism. These resources had been mostly exhausted by 1956 when „Stalinism” ended with the death of Stalin. The second phase of the regime was labelled as „national communism”, lasting from 1956 until the mid-sixties. This period was characterized by the attempts of East-European communist parties to earn their legitimacy by using national rhetoric and heavy industrialization. The results were disastrous as in terms of economic development the infrastructure and agriculture were neglected and in terms of social policy the new changes brought animosity between nationals and minorities or ethnic groups. The last phase which lasted from the late '60s until the communist revolution from 1989 represented the time in which the regime was already starting to crumble as the economy of the communist countries was in danger. However, instead of reforming the system the communist leaders



started to introduce Soviet-like changes, focusing on a second heavy industrialization phase financed by the West (Osiatynski, 1991, pp. 847-849).

During all of these phases there were several population uprisings, revolutions or protests where the population tried to express their discontent with the regime. None of them were successful in terms of actually changing the regime, but they did manage to change mentalities, open perspectives and influence societies in their quest for change. I have decided to focus on the influence the Hungarian Revolution from 1956 and the Prague Spring in 1968 together with the Polish Solidarity movement have influenced further developments and changes that were felt only later on during the 1989 revolutions.

The Hungarian Revolution broke as a result of a speech held by Khrushchev on 26 February 1956 where he accused Stalin of murder, calling him a despot and a tyrant who sent thousands of people to their death (Schöpflin, 1994, pp.112-113). The effect of the speech was different from one East European country to another. In Hungary the speech reverberated the most as it encouraged revisionists and reformers to speak against Rakosi's totalitarian regime which led to the decision of the Moscow regime to change him with Ernest Gero on 18 June 1956. However, this was not the solution Hungarians were searching for, and on 23 October demonstrations started in Budapest triggering the thirteen-day revolution. Even though Nikita Khrushchev has condemned the Stalinist methods and policies, promising reform and condemnation of the past, on 4 November 1956 Soviet tanks rolled into the streets of Budapest and crushed the Hungarian revolution. If the results of Khrushchev's speech were seen right away in Hungary, the Czechoslovakian uprising (which came to be known as the Prague Spring) only broke in 1968 as a result of the saturation of the population against the *nomenklatura* system. The hostilities culminated with the Writer's Union Congress where the calls for freedom were finally reverberated in public to which were added student demonstrations in Strahov. Therefore, in April 1968 the communist party issued the Action Programme that was meant to represent the „first step towards a new democratic model of socialist society” (Ulc, p.123). The Soviet Union feared that such a system would eventually lead to the fall of the regime in the country and invaded Prague on 21 August 1968, putting an end to a reform that was threatening an otherwise „perfect” system. Poland on the other hand has always been an anomaly in the Soviet bloc, especially after the formation of the Solidarity movement which changed social and political life in Poland and alarmed the other communist rulers in Eastern Europe. After this movement Poland a model to follow by both the Communist bloc countries and by the Soviet Union itself, becoming the country with the freest press



and had an outspoken base of political opponents (Mason, 1988, p. 437). Even though the conflict ended with the military victory of the Soviet regime, the moral victory was of the nations.

The revolutions presented above had a major impact on the 1989 Revolution that completely changed the course of history. Mikhail Gorbachev, the General Secretary of the Soviet Union since 1985, was the one to „blame” for the changes and reforms that characterized the 1980s. The most important elements of his domestic policy – Perestroika (restructuring) and Glasnost (openness) were highly influenced by the events and changes that had already taken place in Eastern Europe, even though at that time they were not successful. For instance, the workplace election of managers was a major element of the Solidarity programme and represented one of the major changes Gorbachev introduced once he took the lead of the Soviet Union. The whole idea of these two policies was to allow people to see how things were working outside the Soviet Union in an attempt to increase support for the regime. (Cummings, 2012, p. 59). Unfortunately for Gorbachev his attempt to reform the Soviet Union backfired and the East European countries that were part of the communist bloc began the transition process. While in Poland and Hungary the transition was a peaceful movement that happened through negotiation, in countries such as Romania, the 1989 Revolution was a bloody and violent event as there was no reformist organization or opposition that could help the country transition through negotiation and compromise. Each East European country’s transition and transformation process was different as were the results. Even though the countries included under the umbrella of the so-called communist system shared a common history, comparable institutions, economy and foreign policy orientation, their leadership, political culture and external support differed from case to case. This represented an influential factor on the future development of each East European country.

Chapter 2. THE INVOLVMENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES IN THE ENLARGEMENT HISTORICAL PROCESS

In the second chapter I have tried to depict how this integration process occurred and also establish the involvement of the European Commission in the 5th enlargement wave.

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Communism, the international community were very pessimistic about the development of the East European community. As the Cold War had reached its finality and the Iron Curtain was lifted, the new geopolitical order came as a surprise for most of the international community (O’Brenna, 2006, pp.156-157). This change brought (back) new attitudes of sovereignty, self-determination and self-control, but it also engendered new borders and potentially



new conflicts. The disturbing new reality of the continent frightened most the European Community Member States. They were apprehensive of the emergence of a new world conflict as this part of the world represented a “zone of instability” for Europe and its neighboring countries, as well as an important security threat for the entire world.

The European Union project began in the aftermath of the Second World War, when the continent was all but destroyed, and managed a performance that no “empire”, “coalition”, “organization”, “pact” or “community had ever attained – to bring together, willingly, a number of different countries that would collaborate as an ensemble for a common goal, represented by their economic and political prosperity. As a result, throughout the years, the Community has been in a continuous process of expansion or enlargement. When the Soviet Union finally collapsed, the re-emerging East European countries that were once part of the Soviet bloc saw the opportunity to be part of such a successful project and decided to apply for membership. Therefore, the instability and threats the European continent was facing were to be managed in a controlled way, through enlargement and cooperation among countries.

The association of the terms “East”, “West” and “Europe”, and the simple fact that there is a need to make such a distinction, reflects the dichotomy existent on the continent and the need to unify, reunite or stitch together the European continent. This dichotomy was especially reflected in the 1990s as a legacy of the Cold War and as a geopolitical instance of this division between two very different ideological blocs (Smith, p.757). The Cold War and the communist epoch had done nothing but intensify already existing deep-seated differences between Eastern and Western Europe in terms of economic, social, political and cultural division. The so-called “backwardness” of the East European region is according to Larry Wolff (1994, pp. 1-17) “a long historical process through which the concept was artificially constructed by Enlightenment thinkers”. Even though the traumatic communist experience was a brief stain on the East European history, its legacy lasted much longer and had a bigger impact and influence on the Eastern development than predicted – long after the experiment was over. The more the dichotomy and animosity between Eastern and Western Europe persisted, and the longer it took for the East to be accepted among the Western Community and markets, the stronger these influences become.

The European Commission tried to establish a nexus between the already Member States and the East European states. In the pre-accession process and later on, throughout the enlargement process, building capacity to be able to integrate such a large number of new Member States became the



Commission's main preoccupation. Thus, the first step taken on this enlargement road, as a pre-accession strategy, was to establish the priorities of enlargement. This was followed by actual programs such as the Association Agreements, financial assistance programs, preparation for negotiations through analytical examination of the *acquis* – all of which were meant to prepare the candidate countries for membership by aligning themselves with the European *acquis* before accession (European Commission, 3/2000, p.9). At the center of this pre-accession strategy were the Europe Agreements, the Accession Partnerships and the financial assistance programs (PHARE, SAPARD, ISPA). All of these are subject to a thorough analysis in the third chapter of the research.

Chapter 3: THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EASTERN ENLARGEMENT PROCESS. ANALYSING PROCEEDINGS, MECHANISMS, AND ACTIONS OF EACH EUROPEAN COMMISSION BETWEEN 1989 AND 2004

As presented in the previous chapters, soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 the rest of the European countries that were part of the Soviet Union under Gorbachev followed Eastern Germany in the process of liberalization. Starting primarily from Poland and Hungary the liberalization process soon spread to each communist country from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, the last one being Romania where the events took a violent turn. On the light of these “remarkable events” the heads of State and Government of the European Community met in Paris on 18 November 1989 to respond to the developments that recently took place in Eastern Europe and what they represent not only for the Eastern countries, but for the rest of Europe as well, and why not, for the world as a whole.

Being aware of the responsibilities weighting on its shoulders in this crucial time, the Community decided to follow the path of openness and cooperation with all the European States, but particularly with those which are non-members. The Community knew that the attraction towards becoming a part of this political and economic organization was starting to arise among the Eastern countries and that the West was slowly but surely becoming a model and a stimulus for the East. The Eastern liberalization, more than an opportunity represented a challenge for the countries that were part of the European Community and the cause and effect reaction didn't take long to appear - because change in the East meant integration in the West – “two sides of the same equation”. (Commission, 1989).



Therefore, in order to be able to leave up to the expectations Eastern Europe was projecting on them, the Community needed to become stronger and to accelerate its determination in encouraging the former communist countries to topple totalitarianism. (Conseil Européen, 1989, p.2). In this regard, the Community started to take immediate measures and actions so that the cooperation with those countries that aspire to freedom, democracy and progress to be a strong one, and to encourage the newly liberated states to rebuild on a foundation made out of principles such as democracy, pluralism and the rule of law. In order to show its commitment to the cause several steps were taken.

The third chapter analysis the role of each European Commission, the proceedings and mechanisms used in the integration process of Eastern Europe which is considered one of the most significant events in the history of European integration so far. Given the nature of the enlargement and the number of candidate countries, the process not only lasted more than 15 years (from 1989 until 2004, and then until 2007 with the latter integration of Romania and Bulgaria), but it also spread across four mandates - Jacques Delors, Jacques Santer, Romano Prodi and José Manuel Barroso. Each Commission had a different vision of how the Community should look like after the 5th enlargement wave, and each President took different actions in this regard. Delors envisioned the Community as an “European Village” with a “hose called the European Community. We are its sole architects; we are the keepers of its keys; but we are prepared to open its doors to talk with our neighbors” (Delors, 1989). In this endeavor, various formulas have been suggested during the Delors Commission: regular meetings between European countries at the level of Heads of State and Government, the association of East European countries as “partner-members” in specific Community policies without the right to vote, or through a Pan-European free trade area meant to encourage regional and interregional cooperation. The events in Yugoslavia and the clear desire for the accession of the countries of East Central Europe, forced the Community to issue a clear perspective, and at the Copenhagen Council in 1993 the European Council agreed to start the accession process with the countries in Central and Eastern Europe that desire to become Member States of the Community (European Council, 1993, p.13).

The following Commission led by Jacques Santer, had a step-by-step approach to enlargement. One of the most significant achievements of this Commission was the adoption of the “Agenda 2000 for a stronger and wider Union” in July 1997. The document represented a comprehensive analysis of the benefits and potential drawbacks of the enlargement process. At a time when countries in Eastern Europe were proclaiming their desire to join the Union and they were struggling to sign association



agreements with the EU, Santer was skeptical, as he saw the enlarged Union as a two-speed Europe given all the institutional improvements the Union needed to make in order to be able to function properly before the East European enlargement itself took place, and also all the changes East European countries needed to make as prerequisites of their membership. The arrival of the Prodi Commission sped up the process as right after his investment as President of the Commission, Prodi gave the green light to begin negotiations with the Eastern European countries, at the European Council in Helsinki in December 1999. Thus, the two-step approach to reform devised in Amsterdam was soon outpaced by the speed of events. Therefore, the “big idea” of the Prodi Commission was EU enlargement both in terms of achieving success and preparing the Commission for this endeavor.

Chapter 4. CASE STUDY. MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COOPERATION AND VERIFICATION MECHANISM IN ROMANIA WITHIN THE FIRST TEN YEARS OF MEMBERSHIP

The fourth chapter consists of a case study on Romania and the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism imposed in the post-accession era. This chapter brings together the findings from previous chapters in an attempt to explain why Romania is still lagging behind other former communist countries that conducted the same enlargement process as Romania did, and why it is considered the weak link of the European Union.

Ever since its accession to the European Union, Romania's position did not change much, as it is still somewhat regarded as the weak link of the Union. The Europeanization process had beneficial consequences upon the Romanian society, but it also had its limitations. We will try to establish the EU's role in promoting reform inside the country and the limits of the EU's influence, and the power local politicians had in this transition process. An essential part of the negotiations between Romania and the EU was due to several central Romanian political figures that tried and partially succeeded in imposing their own will and shaping the country as they pleased.

In the structure of the doctoral thesis - chapters 1, 2, and 3 - we analyzed the perspective of the European Commission, how they were perceived by this institution with such an essential role in the enlargement process, and mainly how they were supported by procedures, mechanisms, decisions, position papers, the main stages of the former communist countries, namely transition, Europeanisation and integration.



It has to be mentioned that between these candidate countries, the proceedings have not been completely separated. They have been consistent increases and visible developments from one stage to the next, enjoying the support and even the shaping of the European Commission, through twining procedures, through the practical exercise of cultural and institutional learning, all for the accession to the title of Member State of the European Union. These proceedings concerning Central-Eastern Europe were not the same in the ex-communist area. There have been even significantly different routes, with delays in procedures in Romania and Bulgaria.

However, the file on integration - with all the components managed by the Commission - was defined by unified approaches. The Opinions published by the Commission have always highlighted very accurately the stages of the preparations for accession and then integration.

Our thesis conducts original research. It can be considered a first in our historiography, as - based on the documents of the Historical Archives of the European Union in Florence, on official documents issued by the European Commission and other European institutions - the analysis is focused at their level and of course quantifies how the actual aid granted to speed up the integration process is perceived at the member states level.

A case study dedicated to Romania could not miss from the study, by which we did not want to resume in extensor the substantial historical purchases produced for our country and for which remarkable studies are already published. Instead, we had intended to set out the moments when the European file on the complicated and challenging Romanian accession process was supported in the country and by the powerful institutions in this process at the EU level.

Therefore, within this chapter, there is a summary of the 30 years of transition, Europeanisation, and integration and a necessary projection of mechanisms the EU has succeeded in implementing in the ex-communist area, even if with inevitable delays in Romania.

The conclusions of the study are presented as they emerged from each chapter's findings, according to the research questions established at the beginning. This situation leads to a case where the research findings add to existing literature and knowledge.

The final study will have a significant impact on East-Central perceptions of the European Commission, raising awareness about the complexity of its mechanisms and endeavors as a promoter of further integration. Thus it will create a complementary view on the future of a protracted enlargement process, which appears to have stalled and needs to be rekindled. It will also enrich scientific knowledge of this institution's internal procedures, seen through the EU policy lens, which



has arguably had the most significant and most spectacular impact on the continent to date, namely enlargement. In recent years the enlargement process faced Eurosceptic elements and stagnation, some due to lack of communication, and others, far more consistent, generated by the national-supranational relationship and the shared competences between the Member States and the European institutions. By bringing to the general public the complexity of the Commission's mechanisms and efforts as a promoter of integration, we will create a well-deserved interface on the vision for the future of the integration and enlargement process. The study will also enrich knowledge regarding the comitology and internal procedures of the European institutions.

Keywords: *European Commission, East-Central Europe, Europeanization, enlargement, integration, communism, transition, accession, pre-accession strategy, Control, and Verification Mechanism, Romania*